Handcrafts

323 [462] Among the few handcrafts practiced in the Tzeltal areas, ceramics, produced mainly by women, is the most widespread. Tenango [184] and Amatenango del Valle are the only communities which have made a specialty of this craft. Tenango exports its products [439] through the northern zone, Amatenango through the southern zone, including neighboring Guatemalan villages. Both places use 323 184 a similar ceramic technique but different shape and ornamentation. Referring to Amatenango del Valle, Blom and LaFarge (1926–27, 2:396) state:

> The pottery, which is their chief product, is almost all of one shape; a sphere, with three handles and a narrow bottle-neck with a flat lip. The decoration does not vary. Both shape and design, however, are of considerable charm. The polish is fine and smooth, giving an even golden-red colour all over, with the decoration in a deep, reddish brown. No such fine, finished work is done by other tribes in the area. The pots are baked by placing them on a rectangle of boards, two or more meters square, around a hot fire. The woman in charge turns them [438] until they are done. These pots are carried by [439] the men as far as San Cristóbal, where they are redistributed, and to Nenton in Guatemala.

283 286 Another widespread craft is spinning and weaving of fabrics for clothing. No village [438] in the Tzeltal area trades these products because production barely meets their family needs. The backstrap loom of pre-Hispanic origin is the chief tool.

[184] Pita articles—ropes, bags, and nets to gather the harvest or carry loads—are mainly produced in Oxchuc and Cancuc. 322 184 In Cancuc wooden combs are also manufactured.

342 *Houses and Furniture*

Houses, from 3 to 5 m. on a side, are predominantly square with thatched roofs. The walls are wattle-and-daub or plain tree trunks tied with vines. Floors are of [354] hardened earth. The houses only have one door and no windows, except in some vil-

[P. 207-A]

342 lages of the lowlands where the houses have
[354] small windows, which improve ventilation
342 and illumination slightly. In places like
184 Chanal, where there is abundant lumber, the sides of the houses are built with wooden boards set vertically. The largest and best-built houses are in Tenejapa center.

Generally, the hut is divided into two rooms: the front is parlor and kitchen, the rear is bedroom. In Bachajon the rear room serves as bedroom and kitchen, the front room for sewing and grinding and the re-
[574] ception of visitors. In Amatenango del Valle the front of the house is open and
[323] used as a porch for visits. Ceramic work
[251] is also performed here. In one room of the house a bin of wood or reeds stores corn.
[343] Sometimes, small structures which serve as granaries are built inside the hut.

343 Among the auxiliary structures outside is
515 the temascal (*pus*) used for steam baths. Not every hut has a *pus* since one is enough to attend the needs of several neighboring families. The *pus* is a small room 1.5 m. high by 2 m. on each side, built of stones and clay. The roof is flat. Inside a hollow forms a hearth for heating stones. Water thrown on these red-hot stones produces the necessary steam. On the floor are boards on which people lie while taking the bath.
[184] Among the Tzeltal and Tzotzil the *pus* is
[757] not only for cleanliness but also for the cure
[846] of certain diseases and to strengthen women after childbirth. Sweat baths are more commonly taken in Tierra Fria than in Tierra Caliente.

417 The other structures near the hut are the chickencoop and the hogpen.

352 Furniture is limited to essential items. In the kitchen are the three hearth stones, the comal (*samet*), the grinding stone (*chá*), a bench or strong table to hold the metate (*ah-ken*), one or two small tables (*matz-malté* or *vebalté*) 25–39 cm. high and 30–40 cm. in diameter, and small benches 15–20 cm. high made of scooped-out tree trunks
415 (*tzanté*). Kitchen equipment includes earthenware (pans, pitchers, and jars) and

[P. 207-B]

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

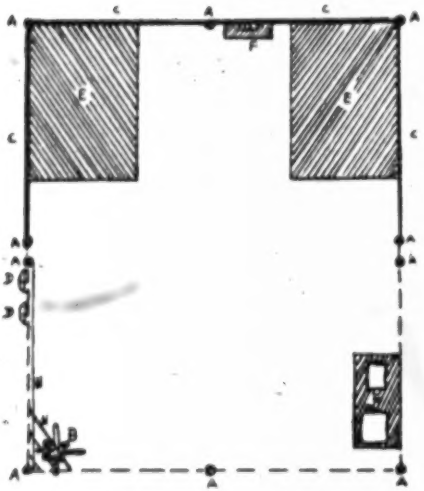

FIG. 288—El Encanto, Chia. Bachajon House. Plan. (Scale 1:100).

A. Uprights, kuk'up.
B. Fire.
C. Wall, p'ahk.
D. Rat Trap.
E. Beds.
F. Altar.
G. Table with Metates.
H. Racks.

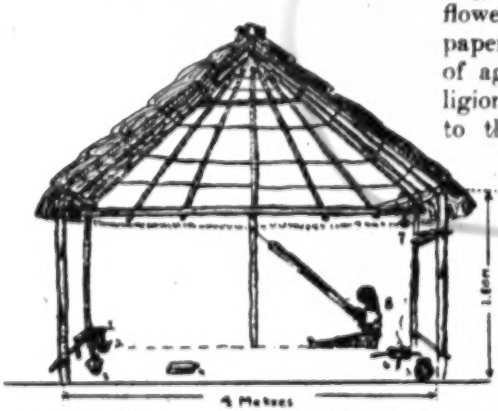

FIG. 289—El Encanto, Chia. Section of Bachajon House.

1. Table, ahk'en, with Metates.
2. Basket of clay, tzavek lum.
3. Tenango water jar, k'ip.
4. Squatting chair, tzamale.
5. Olla, ocom.
6. Fire, kak'.
7. Racks, hartut, with packages.
8. Woman weaving.

a central front and back post, and two posts close together on each side at the ends of the walls, supported the roof-beams. There were no horizontal members save the plates, following the line of the eaves. The rafters were built up from these direct to the ridge-pole, joined by light cross pieces, or thatching-poles, laid on outside. Near the top they were braced by a purlin of heavy logs on the inside. From floor to eaves it was 1.80 meters, and about the same from eaves to the ridge-pole. The floor was of hard dirt, fairly well levelled, and well swept. We were told that situations on hills, such as this, are commonly chosen to assure drainage, and that there is no orientation.

The altar, a table and a large cross decorated with flowers, pine-tips, and bits of paper, which will be spoken of again when discussing religion, was placed at the back to the right of the middle post. In front, to the right, was the table, *ahk'en*, on which were two metates, or grinding stones. They were legless, one end being raised slightly by propping with stones. The finer one was called *skaltca-tut* ("metate-small"), it was made of a fine, sandy lime-

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

412 stone, *ton-al-ha'*, ("water stone"). The other, *skaltca-muk* ("big metate") was made of an igneous stone called *hayáltcak*, brought from San Martín. The *manos*, or smaller stones used for grinding on these, were called *miscabtca* (fig. 290). To the left, opposite this table, was the fire, *kak'*, built of two broken ollas and two small rocks, placed so that the logs could be laid star-fashion between them, and close enough together to support the tortilla griddle or an olla (fig. 291). Outside the house was another fire, with only three stones, on which was drying a basket full of *pinole*, *tcilim*, a fruit which is mixed with cacao in a form of chocolate. Over the house fireplace racks, *baxtet*, were placed at the level of the eaves across the corner, and along the wall to the middle post, that things hung up there might be protected by the smoke from insects. All these things are indicated in the plan.

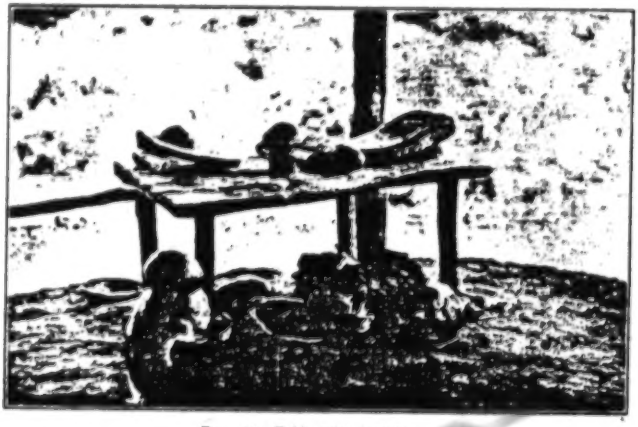

Fig. 290—Table with Metates.

352 A hammock, *aktci*, which we understood was not of native make, hung across the middle of the house. Two woven mats, *pOp*, the Spanish *petate*, lay on the beds. Beside this, the beds, and the table, the only thing that could properly be called furniture was a three-legged stool about 80 centimeters high, *matsumte*. Two mats of pounded bark, or tapa, *bat-te* ("bark tree"), or *bat manil tcahan*, were rolled up in a corner. First comers got the hammock to lie in, others sat on the low "squatting seats," *tsamate*, of which there were three, made each of half a log, peeled, and partially flattened on top, with a handle on one end.

415 The tortilla griddle was a flat, dish-like pottery affair, about 40 centimeters in diameter. There were five ollas, *ŏcom*, with plain

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Bachajón

necks and round bottoms. Two were full of corn and lime for tortillas, just off the fire. A big Tenango jar, *k'ip*, of the kind to be described at that place, was used for water.

A pottery dish, about 7 centimeters across, *tsets*, is commonly offered to guests to wash their hands. It is placed on a pottery stand of an hour-glass shape, about 15 centimeters high, *awaliko* (see fig. 299). The ordinary plates and general vessels are flat gourd dishes, *qai'*, about 20 centimeters across. Gourds as well were used for a dipper, *tuts*, and a water-jar, *tsux*. Two nets hung from the rack. There were three small baskets, *tutemotc*, and four big ones, *mukulmotc*. Hanging on the wall were a pair of the basket-work sandals mentioned before, and selected ears of corn for seed. The wife's textile outfit, more fully described later, consisted of a spindle, *pětět*,

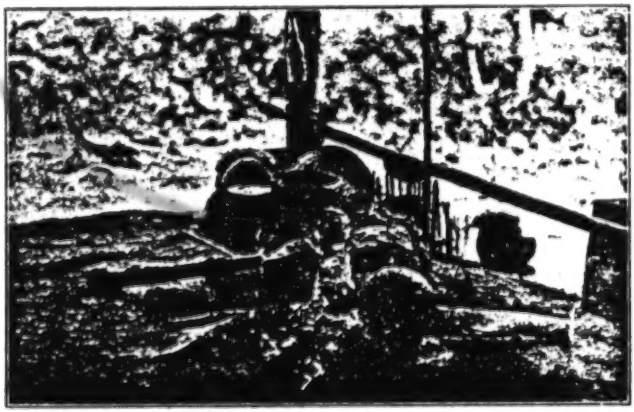

FIG. 281—Bachajon Fireplace.

with clay whorl, spun in a gourd bowl, *tsima*, cotton, *t'umin*, hanging in leaves, and the loom itself, *holčl*. A sling, made of a forked stick and rubber band with a leather piece to take the clay pellet, *finmutc*, belonged to the small boy. Bananas were drying on the rack. With them were laid, or hanging in packages of leaves, beeswax, *tcavek*, blocks, 20 x 20 x 2 centimeters, for trade purposes, used for making candles, a lump of hard red clay, *baq lum* ("bitter earth"), for washing the hair, and sometimes also eaten, a package of brown loaf sugar, salt, *atsam*, traded down from the Zotzil country, several packages of pimiento pepper, and serpent fat, *junto tcan*, for rubbing on the chest to cure coughs. Under the table was a basket of coarse, blackish-gray clay for making pottery, *tcavek lum* ("beeswax earth"). Five wild boars' jaws and an armadillo's tail

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Tenango

133 green wall away to the westward. Midway, there is a break in the slope, with a dramatic splash of deep red cliffs, in violent contrast
241 to the fertile grass and soft tones of the limestone outcrops. Only the upper end of this valley belongs to Tenango, so little, in fact that the inhabitants cannot practice the usual, sprawling milpa sys-
[351] tem of agriculture. The very yards are planted, and the fields
[417] start almost in the village, radiating from it in a close patchwork as in Europe. Everything is fenced with roughly split planks set on end, and fences line the road into Tenango where it passes
361 through the cornfields. The houses with their yards lie close about an open plaza in which are the grey bones of a ruined church, a

342 361

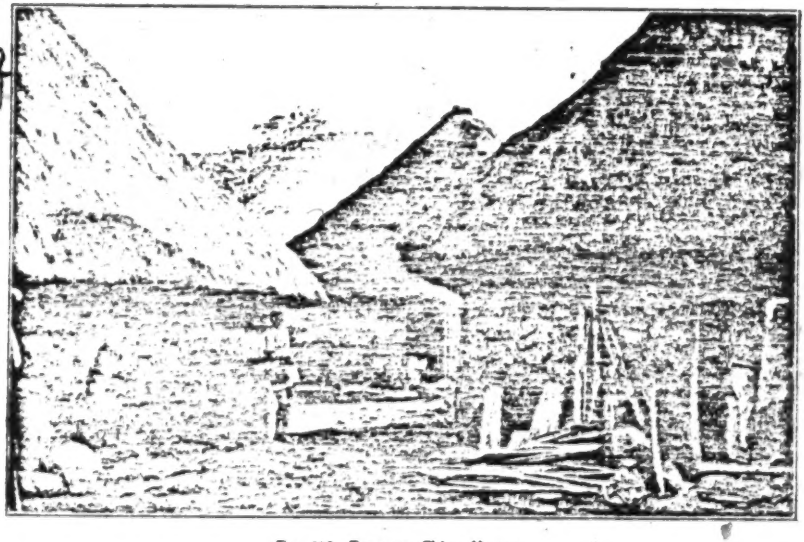

Fig. 312—Tenango, Chis. Houses.

361 whitewashed, palm-roofed native one, and the shack of a Cabildo for
245 the Maestro. The streets are lined with useful trees, oranges, gourds,
363 and a few bananas, which do poorly at this altitude.

342 The houses are square and well-made with walls of broad, split planks covered with mud (figs. 311-312). The roofs are steeply thatched and pyramidal, or have a short ridge along which broken pots are laid after the manner of tiles. The frame-work differs from that described in the last chapter in having cross-pieces laid between
[354] the plates. There are no chimneys, the smoke is allowed to seep through the thatch, keeping out vermin and making the roofs steam like a clam-bake.

5: Blom & LaFarge A,E-4,5 (1925) 1927 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Cancuc

that he was invited into her house, presumably to take shelter from the evening rain that was beginning to fall. The house, of which he sketched a hurried plan (fig. 324) was more rectangular than is usual, the prevailing type being square with a pyramidal roof. He entered through a low doorway, closed with a wooden door on leather hinges. Although the ridge of the roof was high, the many cross poles reaching from the top of one wall to the other made it necessary to stoop. The writer squatted by the door, facing the fire, which smoked merrily in the closed room. The old woman immediately set to shaping a pile of tortillas for baking. Along either wall was a well-made bench, decorated with notches along the top and geometric designs on the back, similar to the benches on the Cabildo porch (fig. 325). These and a sturdy table that was stored on top of the stringers were said to be purely local products. By the door stood a big jar, a full meter in height, crude and undecorated (fig. 326). There was the usual collection of ollas and gourds, and one other new form, an open-mouthed pot about eight centimeters high and as many in diameter, flat bottomed, with a handle on one side, called *hute* (fig. 327). In the thick smoke, it was hard to see anything. I was interested to note that my hostess' eyes watered nearly as much as my own. In the darker end of the house I could make out corn stacked neatly along one wall, and a partition that presumably hid the beds. For a while the woman answered the few questions that I could make her understand by means of signs, my half-a-dozen words of Tzeltal,

FIG. 325—Cancuc, Chis. Drinking scaffold.

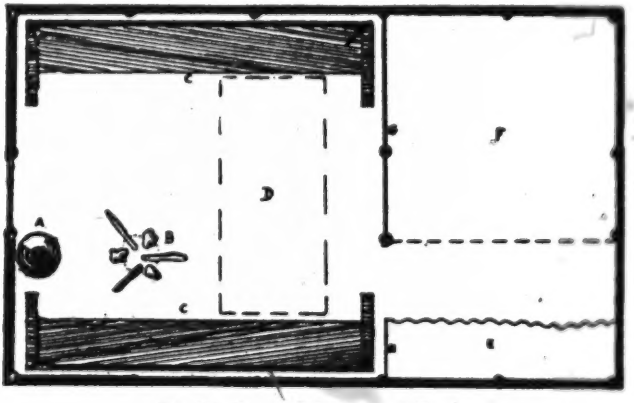

FIG. 324—Cancuc, Chis. Plan of House.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

of metal and 10 pesos if made of wood. These are lined with waxed paper which the local storekeeper cuts from cracker-box wrappers and sells for 5 cents each.

Electricity, first used in the cooperative store and later in the liquor shops, is now being installed in houses. 83 families had electricity installed in their homes by 1967. Street lights have been in operation since 1966, although the first attempt to install them was blocked by residents on the streets to be lighted who did not want to pay the tax of 1 peso per month per household to meet the cost to the community of 75 pesos a month. Most people have a flashlight, and lighting in the house is provided by pitch pine or by small kerosene lamps. Candles are used only in ceremonies.

The inventory of items sold in the cooperative store in town includes the most frequently purchased items of consumption. Hardward includes buckets, hoes, kerosene lamps, batteries, Gillette blades, shotgun bullets, canned goods such as sardines, chiles, and powdered milk. Packaged foods include rice, sugar, salt, oatmeal, cornstarch, flour, coffee, biscuits, cookies, gum, and candy. Beer is sold along with soft drinks and cigarettes. Household supplies include candles, soap, D.D.T. powder, thread, matches, and kerosene. Medicines dispensed most frequently include sulphur pills, aralin, Desenfriol, Alka-Seltzer, and Sonrisal. Yard goods for shawls, children's wraps, and men's clothing are sold along with manufactured shirts, blouses for girls, and rubber capes. Eggs as well as money are taken in payment and then sold. Except for one can of Chocomilk, which sat on the shelves for a year, all of the items are in constant demand, and provide an index to the level of living and dependency on external markets.

The preferences in changing consumption are limited by communal standards of what is appropriate. I once asked a man who was acquiring more than the usual income by brokerage activities what he would buy with more money. He replied, "I would get more land and cattle." I interrupted to ask what he would do to improve his standard of living. "I wouldn't get better clothing—what would I need that for? I would get a house built with good materials like this [the government-built clinic] with a cement floor. But I couldn't get it now because of envy. When my children grow up, they [the neighbors] will see them working and maybe

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

square. Although this conception is contradicted by knowledge learned in school, the two concepts are not brought into direct opposition. The town still defines the outer limit of most meaningful social relations, and most people are not forced by the circumstances of their lives to deal with an understanding of the world as round. It is enough that the four "sides" of their village be protected by crosses at the points of entry. The important orientation points are the east, referred to as the "coming out of the sun," and the west, referred to as "the sleeping place of the sun." North and south are referred to as lowland and highland because of the topography. Compass orientation is important behaviorally only at death. The body of the deceased is laid out in the cemetery with the head to the east. Indians comment that the Ladinos lay the body out with the head to the west, but Indians of other towns, such as Zinacantan, also do so. The cemetery is located on the western side of the town.

The House

The reference to the house in prayer as "the entry to suffering, inside the poverty" suggests the "cult of poverty" which Wolf (1955:459) points out as characteristic of closed corporate Indian communities. Most people conform to a standard house size of five square meters subdivided into an interior sleeping and living area and a porch (Fig. 8). The walls are made of mud strengthened with lime packed in a framework of poles supported on nine main posts. The roofs are pitched with four sheds rising steeply to a truncated ridge. Tiles are used in most new houses to cover the roof, but there are still many thatched palm or wooden shingle roofs. Corn and beans are stored in the rafters under the eaves of the house.

Inside the house, beds line the two side walls. If there is no cooking shack separate from the house, the hearth is placed in the center of the interior room. The grinding stone, raised on three posts, is placed to the left of the center post.

The porch is the area for ceremonial gatherings and for making and storing pottery. A table with the pictures of household saints set against the inside wall, is adorned with flowers and candles. During house fiestas, men sit on the benches lining the four walls of the porch, while the women sit inside in a semicircle.

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango .
Aguacatenango

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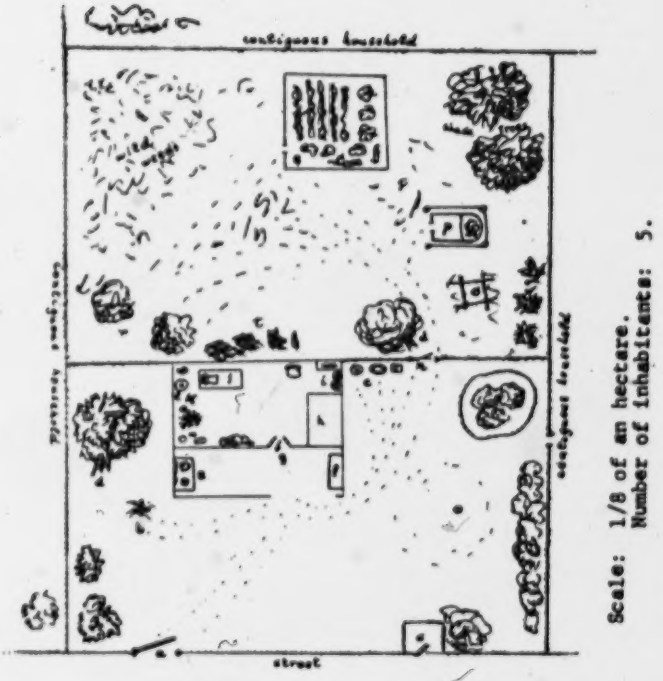

Fig. 10.--Model of a Standard Household

a--entrance gate
b--nixtamal washing-pot
c--water pots
d--chicken coop in a tree
e--Saint's altar in the corridor
f--bench for receiving visitors
g--double door
h--wooden bed
i--petates (mats) chest and chair
j--table for making tortillas (with the grinding stone or metate)
k--molino and fire place
l--water pot inside the house
m--little stools for seating during meals and stored bags
n--gate to back yard
o--raised pig-pen
p--temascal (steam bath)
q--garden with chillis, and "tomatoes"
r--peach trees
s--pig-pen with gate to the street
t--fire-wood drying

8: Hunt E-4,5 (1958)1962 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango .
Aguacatenango

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Fig. 11.--House Viewed from the Street Gate